Jamaica supports the statement delivered on behalf of the GRULAC member States.

The impact of COVID-19 has forced us to readjust our modus operandi, and as virtual meetings became the new norm, we are pleased to have participated in many of the forums hosted by UNESCO Paris and our Caribbean Cluster office. We commend the team at the office in Kingston for the proactive approach in allowing us to make an input into the various activities.

Our engagements going forward within UNESCO will of necessity bear the imprimatur of the impact of the pandemic. Let these lessons be used to help us to work more efficiently, effectively and strategically. The resurgence of interest and opportunities created in the areas of digital literacy, information and ethics should be pursued by UNESCO to their best advantage.

Seen through that prism, the post-COVID context is one in which we can usefully re-affirm the priority to be given to SIDS, which because of their inherent vulnerabilities were disproportionately affected by the demands of the response.

We note that UNESCO proposes to strengthen its inter-sectoral and trans-disciplinary interventions in SIDS in the areas which include mitigating climate change, building resilience to natural disasters including at designated World Heritage and Biosphere Reserve sites, and in developing ICTs. We urge support for the draft Decision on the SIDS Action Plan.

My delegation recalls that Jamaica hosted the first Caribbean Regional Partners Forum in September 2019, which provided a platform for dialogue to reflect on
future lines of action on prevalent challenges in Caribbean SIDS, with a focus on youth, climate change and disaster preparedness. It is to be hoped that the outcomes of this activity have not been lost.

With respect to the strategic transformation underway, we take note of the progress made in the timely implementation of Pillars 1, 2 and 3. While strategic transformation remains valid as a fundamental approach, it is evident that the pursuit of its goals will now have to be infused with an appreciation of recent developments and current realities, whose effects could be enduring.

Heavily impacted by COVID19, our Education System continues its thrust to provide equal opportunities for all learners in an inclusive and equitable manner. Whilst we can boast of a high gender parity, where girls sometimes outperform boys, we continue to make strides to improve on the principles of inclusion. The work being done by UNESCO to align its mandate to respond to the evolving education architecture is supported by Jamaica, especially the expressed plans to focus on SIDS. The time has come for more collaborative work to be done in this area.

Jamaica acknowledges the continued relevance of the strategy for technical and vocational education and training, and echoes the call for extra-budgetary support for the advancement of this strategy in the SIDS, especially in light of the emerging reliance on online learning. We also acknowledge the need for all Member States to rethink education and the organization of learning especially, in a context of increased complexities which now include the impact of the pandemic. There is a greater need for capacity-building for teachers, youth and students as they are forced to transition to the digital world to prevent a breach of a child’s inalienable right to quality education. The brick-and-wall model of learning is fast becoming a relic of the past, and so UNESCO should lead the charge on the mix-modality of learning for all children as part of the new dispensation.

Jamaica understands the value of the recommendations being made concerning the various initiatives, programmes, and action plans in respect of SDG4 and its targets, and offers its support for the proposed draft decisions for adoption by the Executive Board.
With reference to the “*Progress report on the strengthening of the Slave Route Project*, Jamaica supports the refocusing of the Project to include more in-depth areas such as cities and youth, as this will give greater relevance to its impact, especially in the areas of research, education and capacity-building at sites of memory. We also support its anchoring in the Social and Human Sciences Sector to enhance the opportunity to strengthen dialogue and action on issues of racism, human rights and discrimination, whose treatment could not be more urgent than at a time as this.

The culture sector was tangibly impacted by the pandemic and great set-backs resulted. At the same time, it was an area through which many were able to maintain their equilibrium in the face of the devastating circumstances. UNESCO’s role to help to restore and build back the sector, including through the use of new technologies, will be significant.

Finally, we appreciate that the coming period will be an uncomfortable for many as we seek to adjust to new and emerging situations. Nevertheless, let us be bold and lead by example. Others will be relying on us to continue to lead the charge in the areas of education, science and culture, as lies within our mandate.

I thank you.

*Permanent Delegation of Jamaica to UNESCO*

*Brussels, Belgium*

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